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DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA; NEA/I, DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN: NGO CONSIDERS CHRISTIAN RESETTLEMENT IN NORTHERN IRAQ

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission, AMEMB VATICAN, STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Chaldean and Syrian Church Leaders in Mosul, Iraq have proposed resettling displaced Iraqi Christians in an area of Northern Iraq. Vatican-affiliated NGO the Community of Sant'Egidio plans to visit Northern Iraq in November to meet with Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) leaders to discuss the initiative which the KRG leadership has welcomed in principle. Sant'Egidio representative Claudio Betti will be in the Department for meetings the week of October 23. End Summary.

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Northern Iraq Area for Christian Resettlement?  
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[¶2.](#) (C) Vatican Officials have long expressed concern over the several thousand Iraqi Christians who left the country during the former regime of Saddam Hussein. They are equally concerned about those who continue to leave Central and Southern Iraq because of communal violence. It is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 Iraqi Christians have sought refuge in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece. The Chaldean and Syrian Catholic bishops of Mosul have asked Vatican-affiliated NGO the Community of Sant'Egidio to assist and facilitate the return of Iraqi Christians to their homeland in Iraq. The area envisaged for return is Northern Iraq.

[¶3.](#) (C) Sant'Egidio tells us that the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), through its Finance Minister, welcomed the initiative for the return of the refugees. The "Return Program" will facilitate the refugee's transition from their current country of residence to northern Iraq and help with their reintegration into Iraqi society. The objective is to assist the refugees with legal issues, financial support, housing, education and job-training programs, and medical services to ensure their reintegration is as successful as possible, making them contributing members of society.

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Northern Iraq Visit by Sant'Egidio Delegation  
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[¶4.](#) (C) A Sant'Egidio delegation will visit Northern Iraq in November to meet the provincial governors concerned and to evaluate the feasibility of the program. The visit is expected to include meetings with KRG President Barzani, Prime Minister Barzani, Finance Minister Mamendu, and with Minister for Reconstruction and Housing Sayfour.

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Comment  
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15. (C) Post will leave an evaluation of the Sant'Egidio resettlement initiative to Embassy Baghdad and to NEA and PRM experts, but notes its very positive experience with prior Community of Sant'Egidio projects. Chaldean Church Representative to the Holy See Monsignor Najim told us he had personal reservations about the utility of the concept, but that he would reserve judgment until the plans were more fully developed. The Community has proved extremely effective and operationally savvy in inter-religious dialogue, HIV/AIDS treatment and other notable areas. Sant'Egidio International Relations Chief Claudio Betti will be visiting the Department the week of October 23 to discuss various Sant'Egidio initiatives. POC is Vatican Desk Officer John Larrea, 202-647-4361 or LarreaJF@state.gov.

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